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UNCLAS YEREVAN 002045

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

TBILISI FOR LEGATT
FRANKFURT FOR DHS/BICE (JAY PINA)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KCRM](#) [ASEC](#) [CFED](#) [CPAS](#) [SOCI](#) [GG](#) [AM](#) [FBI](#)

SUBJECT: ARMENIA: TRANSFER OF CUSTODY OF L.A. MURDER
FUGITIVE TO U.S. AUTHORITIES

Sensitive but unclassified, please treat accordingly.

Summary

1. (SBU) On November 21, Armenian authorities transferred fugitive suspect Akop Akopyan to U.S. custody. Akopyan, a U.S. Permanent Resident but still an Armenian citizen, was the prime suspect in a September 2000 gangland murder in Los Angeles. The location, apprehension and eventual transfer of custody was the result of extensive cooperation between the Armenian National Security Service (NSS), California law enforcement officers, LEGATT Tbilisi and post's own RSO and Consular offices. The U.S. has no extradition treaty with Armenia. Transfers of this sort are complicated and their success is a manifestation of our strong relationship with law enforcement here. Given the strengthening ties between criminal groupings in the U.S. and Armenia, we suggest it may be time to negotiate a more formal legal arrangement with Armenia. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Post first learned of the Akopyan case during a November 2004 visit by California law enforcement authorities to Yerevan, Armenia. Akopyan a.k.a. "Skooby," was a member of the Southern California based gang "Armenian Power." Akopyan was implicated in the brutal murder of Garnik Gadoyan, an Armenian Power gang member who was serving as a potential witness in a murder trial of another gangland slaying. Akopyan fled to Armenia following the murder.

3. (SBU) RSO pressed the Armenian authorities to search for Akopyan and on August 12, 2005, the Armenian authorities located and arrested him. Following a series of diplomatic exchanges and meetings involving Emboffs, LEGATT and NSS officials, the Armenian government agreed to transfer custody of Akopyan to the U.S. In order that the transfer of custody not violate Armenia's Constitution, Armenia's Prosecutor General denaturalized Akopyan on November 18 and on November 19 the Armenian National Security Service (NSS) escorted Akopyan from Yerevan, Armenia, to Vienna, Austria. Akopyan was subsequently transferred to Washington D.C. by an Austrian security officer and an NSS officer and was placed under FBI custody based on a Federal Arrest Warrant for Unlawful Flight to Avoid Prosecution. Once in FBI custody, Akopyan was transferred to Los Angeles to stand trial.

Comment: We Need a More Formal Mechanism

4. (SBU) This was a positive outcome. Armenian officials recognized the importance the USG attached to this case and found a way to transfer a dangerous fugitive to our custody, even in the absence of an international legal mechanism. While Armenian authorities recognize our appreciation for their cooperation, they ask that we not publicize this transfer as it could open the GOAM to opposition criticism for what could easily be termed an extra-judicial transfer. Our contacts at the NSS have informed us that they will only consider requests for transfers similar to this one in the most serious cases, those involving either terrorism or murder charges. In the absence of a more formal international agreement, Armenia's future cooperation will continue to be dependent on good will and strong relationships between law enforcement bodies. Our thanks to LEGATT Tbilisi and LAPD for helping us make this happen.
EVANS